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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 4th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 6 June 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ferrari ..... (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

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07-36999 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Question of Western Sahara (A/AC.109/2007/17)

2. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the working paper on Western Sahara prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2007/17).

Hearing of petitioners

3. **The Chairperson** recalled that at its 3rd meeting, the Committee had acceded to the request for a hearing from the representative of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO).

4. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Boukhari (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Rio de Oro (Frente POLISARIO)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

5. **Mr. Boukhari** (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO)) said that the ongoing colonial occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco was a challenge to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the authority and credibility of the Organization and a frontal attack on the Committee's objectives concerning the eradication of colonialism. For the past 20 years, Morocco had sabotaged all United Nations efforts to achieve the decolonization of Western Sahara, including the Settlement Plan, the Houston Agreements and the Baker Plan, and, in an attitude typical of colonialism, had made it a policy to violate the human rights of the inhabitants and to plunder the natural resources of the territory that it occupied illegally. As a result of Morocco's obstruction of all peace plans, the decolonization process in Western Sahara had been at a standstill since 2004, a situation that threatened to bring about an end to the 1991 ceasefire.

6. In his April 2006 report on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2006/249), the Secretary-General reminded the Security Council that no State Member of the United Nations recognized Morocco's claim to sovereignty and that the United Nations, contrary to the claims and wishes of Morocco, could not endorse any peace plan that excluded the option of independence. The Secretary-General recommended that the Frente POLISARIO and Morocco should begin direct negotiations under United Nations auspices with a view to a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and expressed concern at the worsening human rights situation in that territory. Those views were reiterated in the subsequent reports of the Secretary-General, (A/61/121 and S/2007/202), in which he noted that both parties had proposed political solutions to the conflict.

7. The occupying Power's proposal was an attempt to legitimize the illegal occupation of Western Sahara through a so-called "autonomy" within the framework of its claim to sovereignty over the territory. However, Morocco had no sovereignty over his country, which it was occupying illegally. The United Nations did not consider Western Sahara to be a Moroccan province, but rather a Non-Self-Governing Territory under illegal occupation as defined in General Assembly resolution 34/37. Furthermore, Morocco's proposal was unacceptable because it violated the principle of self-determination recognized in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) by seeking to impose on the Saharawi people a single option: annexation of the territory by the occupying Power with the loss of the legitimate option of independence.

8. The Frente POLISARIO's proposal, on the other hand, reiterated the validity and necessity of holding a referendum on self-determination at which the Saharawi people would have the right and the opportunity to choose among all the options that had been agreed by the two parties and endorsed by the United Nations since the peace process began in 1991, including that of independence. In the event that the referendum led to independence, the Frente POLISARIO was prepared to establish bilateral preferential relations between the two countries, including in the areas of economics, security and trade. Thus, its proposal reaffirmed its commitment to international law on the issue of decolonization and provided Morocco with a basis for privileged friendly relations in the future. A just and lasting solution within the framework of international law and the establishment of special friendly relations with the occupying Power would contribute to the consolidation of peace and security in the region and to the launching

of the North African integration process that had thus far been blocked.

9. In response to the new Secretary-General's report on the situation in Western Sahara (S/2007/202), the Security Council had adopted resolution 1754 (2007), in which it took note of the two proposals and called upon the parties to enter into negotiations under United Nations auspices with a view to achieving a solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

10. The Frente POLISARIO wished to stress that those negotiations, which were scheduled to begin on 18 June 2007 in New York, should be conducted in good faith and without preconditions. However, Morocco had a history of obstructionism and sabotage, including at the Pacific Regional Seminar, held in Fiji in November 2006, and at the Caribbean Regional Seminar, held in Grenada in May 2007. That attitude, together with the increased repression of the Saharawi people, suggested that the good faith and seriousness required for the negotiations' success were still lacking. Recently, dozens of Saharawi students had been savagely beaten by the Moroccan police and in 2005, two Saharawis had been killed by Occupation forces. The unmarked graves of 50 people who had "disappeared" in the early 1970s had recently come to light in southern Morocco; 526 civilians and 151 soldiers from Western Sahara remained unaccounted for.

11. Governments and humanitarian organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had called on the Moroccan Government to respect the human rights of the inhabitants of the occupied Territory. In May 2006, a delegation dispatched by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights to Western Sahara in order to investigate the human rights situation there had confirmed the existence of violations and had attributed them to the failure to ensure the Saharawi people's right to self-determination.

12. The direct negotiations were an opportunity to work towards a peaceful, civilized solution which would end a war of colonial occupation that was motivated by anachronistic expansionist ambition aimed not only at the Saharawi people but at the peoples of neighbouring countries. The Special Committee should do its utmost to ensure that decolonization took place with respect for international law and, in particular, for General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The referendum on self-determination that the United Nations had recommended in the case of Western Sahara was the only mutually acceptable political solution and the only solution endorsed by the Security Council; as such, it was both necessary and inevitable.

13. No one, including the occupying Power, should seek to determine unilaterally the future of a people under colonial occupation without a valid consultation of that people. That error had been committed in 1975, when Western Sahara had been invaded and occupied by Morocco, and its tragic consequences were still being felt. The Saharawi people could not be the exception to the rule with regard to the right to self-determination.

14. **Mr. Benítez Versón** (Cuba) said that the Saharawi people, denied their inalienable right to self-determination for more than three decades, had a right to determine their own future. As had been stated repeatedly by the United Nations, the conflict in Western Sahara was a decolonization issue that fell within the scope of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and was, therefore, the direct responsibility of the United Nations. In accordance with 41 resolutions adopted by the United Nations since Western Sahara had been included in the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1965, the Saharawi people had the right to determine their future freely, without conditions or pressure of any kind.

15. His delegation fully supported the Non-Aligned Movement's common position on the question of Western Sahara, as contained in the Final Document of the Fourteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana from 11 to 16 September 2006. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1754 (2007), it was hoped that the parties could start negotiations as soon as possible, in good faith and without any preconditions, so as to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution within the framework of the principles of the Charter and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The Special Committee had a key role to play in the consideration of the issue, which had been on its agenda for many years and must remain there for as long as was necessary.

16. The Saharawi people needed the international community's support more than ever. Despite its

modest resources, Cuba had contributed, to the extent possible, to the Saharan people's self-development, particularly in the area of education. In response to repeated calls by the General Assembly that Member States should provide study and training opportunities for the inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories, 569 Saharawi students were currently studying in Cuba. His Government would continue to support a just and final solution to the question of Western Sahara, in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly. The Saharawi people would always be able to rely on the solidarity of Cuba in their heroic struggle to exercise their legitimate rights.

17. *Mr. Boukhari withdrew.*

18. **The Chairperson** said that, if there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to transmit all relevant documents under the agenda item to the General Assembly for consideration by the Fourth Committee.

19. *It was so decided.*

Question of the dissemination of information on decolonization (A/AC.109/2007/18)

20. **Mr. Fawzi** (Department of Public Information), introducing the report of the Department of Public Information on the dissemination of information on decolonization (A/AC.109/2007/18), said that the Department's activities pertaining to decolonization could be broadly characterized as coverage and outreach. With respect to coverage, the Department's activities had focused on the work of the General Assembly, particularly the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee.

21. The Department had deployed one officer from United Nations Radio and another from the Press Section to cover the recent Caribbean Regional Seminar in Grenada. The Radio Officer had filed reports on the proceedings for use by the Department's other radio language units and distribution to the worldwide network of radio stations that used its feeds. The Press Officer had produced press releases for dissemination to global audiences, including through the United Nations News Centre, the most heavily visited portal on the Organization's website. The Department had also issued 49 press releases on other relevant meetings held during the reporting period, including six relating to the Pacific Regional Seminar in Fiji.

22. United Nations Radio had continued to cover decolonization and related issues, particularly in connection with Western Sahara and other Non-Self-Governing Territories, in its daily news programmes and current affairs magazines in both official and non-official languages for regional and worldwide dissemination.

23. With respect to outreach, the Department, in cooperation with the Decolonization Unit of the Department of Political Affairs, had prepared a brochure entitled "What the United Nations Can Do to Assist Non-Self-Governing Territories" in English, French and Spanish. The brochure, which provided details on United Nations bodies that could assist those Territories in the exercise of their right to self-determination and in improving their economic and social conditions, had been uploaded onto the decolonization page of the United Nations website in June 2006 and revised in January 2007; the printed version had been published in April 2007 and disseminated through the worldwide network of United Nations Information Centres (UNICS) and system partners. An electronic version had also been disseminated to target audiences.

24. United Nations News Centre and News Service coverage of the June 2006 meetings of the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Secretary-General's message to the Regional Seminar in Fiji had been picked up by a number of external websites, including those of media outlets and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Stories on decolonization were given prominence on the front page of the News Centre site, which attracted nearly a million visitors per month in English and had an e-mail news alert service with over 46,000 subscribers in French and English.

25. The widely read publication *Basic Facts about the United Nations* devoted a full chapter to success stories and ongoing activities in support of decolonization; the *Yearbook of the United Nations* for 2004 provided full coverage of the Special Committee's activities during that year; and the *UN Chronicle*, another of the Department's publications, had published three online features on decolonization.

26. The UNICS network provided global coverage. The United Nations Information Service in Geneva

issued press releases on decolonization by human rights experts and produced summaries of meetings at which the issue was discussed, particularly during relevant meetings of the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, which were posted on the media page of the Service's website. In preparation for the 2006 Regional Seminar in Fiji, the UNIC in Canberra had disseminated information on decolonization to media of the region in preparation for the 2006 Regional Seminar in Fiji and its Information Officer had met with a number of Fijian journalists and provided them with copies of the Department's brochures on decolonization and other regional issues. In addition, stimulated by the new brochure on assistance available from the United Nations, the UNIC at Port-of-Spain had discussed with other United Nations funds and programmes ways of assisting the Non-Self-Governing Territories in their region.

27. **Ms. Mackay** (Chief, Decolonization Unit, Department of Political Affairs) said that during the period under review the Department of Political Affairs had continued, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information, to do its utmost to disseminate information about the decolonization process in order to encourage steps towards self-determination in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories.

28. In preparing working papers for the Committee, the Department collected information on the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories from many sources. It sought the cooperation of the administering Powers in providing information under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, monitored numerous media and Internet sites, and gathered information from participants at regional seminars conducted by the Committee, during visiting missions, and from petitioners participating in meetings of the Committee and in hearings of the Fourth Committee. Such occasions also provided the Department with an opportunity to disseminate information about the decolonization mandate of the United Nations. Material was distributed to participants from the Territories at the regional seminars and was provided to petitioners who participated in the meetings of the Special Committee and the Fourth Committee. A regional seminar for the Pacific region had been held in Fiji in November 2006 and a Caribbean regional seminar had been held in Grenada in May 2007.

29. A leaflet entitled "What the UN Can Do to Assist Non-Self-Governing Territories", which had been prepared by the Department of Public Information in consultation with the Department of Political Affairs, had been disseminated during those seminars and at other meetings. That leaflet included the contact details for United Nations bodies that could assist Territories in exercising their right to self-determination and improving their economic and social conditions. The material distributed included an updated 2005 version of a brochure that gave a broad overview of the historical involvement of the United Nations in decolonization and of the role of the Special Committee. It also included a brochure entitled "The United Nations and Decolonization, Questions & Answers" on the role of the United Nations in decolonization, the work of the Special Committee and the options available to the Territories with respect to their future status. The Department also continued to provide up-to-date information to the Public Inquiries Unit and the Guided Tour Unit on decolonization matters. It had contributed to the updating of the chapter on decolonization in the publication *Basic Facts about the United Nations* and provided factual information for the *United Nations Yearbook*.

30. Despite those activities, disseminating information on the Organization's decolonization mandate remained a challenge. The website on decolonization represented a concrete effort at reaching out worldwide, both in terms of breadth of content and coverage. Since assuming the responsibility for maintaining the United Nations website on decolonization, the Department had updated the information on a regular basis. The website included background information, official documentation concerning decolonization, press releases and regional seminar papers. Progress had been made towards working on a design that would make the website more informative and user-friendly.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.4: Dissemination of information on decolonization

31. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.4 was adopted.*

Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations

32. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/67), which contained information provided by the administering Powers under Article 73 *e* of the Charter.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.5: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e *of the Charter of the United Nations*

33. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.5 was adopted.*

Question of sending visiting missions to Territories

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.6: Question of sending visiting and special missions to Territories

34. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.6 was adopted.*

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.